LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.

My dear Sorillah:

When we walked through the Architectural Exhibition together the other day you seemed interested by the glimpses of history which became visible through the chinks, so to speak, of a running commentary on the drawings there collected, and asked me to give you some general notion of a study which promised to be more agreeable than you had anticipated. I willingly comply, delighted to have such a pupil, and proceed to put your new-born enthusiasm to the test, beginning from the earliest times, and intending to trace the progress upward till we reach our own days. Should some parts of the road prove dusty and barren, you must not at once abandon the journey, but trudge over them contentedly for the sake of the prettier country they will lead to.

The term "Architecture" suggested to you, probably, as to many others, nothing more attractive than a dry study of the most efficient modes of heaping one stone upon another to form a building. But, as you saw, there are other and totally different points of view from which architecture is seen to afford matter of interest on which the most refined and powerful intellect may exercise itself, and which may worthily occupy the attention of any one who possesses a cultivated mind. I mean architecture as a fine art,—a producer of beauty; and it would be well if more attention were given to it in this respect by the general student than is usually the case: advantages of no common kind would result, and fresh sources of pleasure would be opened to the inquirer almost boundless in extent. With this most interesting part of the subject, however, I do not propose to deal now. There is a third light under which it may be considered, namely, *historically*, and thus it is I intend to place it before you in the following letters. If it fail to interest you, the fault will not rest with the subject, but with me.

From the earliest period in the history of the world (when the number of men was few), the love of society, to say nothing of fear of the tigers, led them to congregate in particular spots. Sustenance was of course the first consideration; but this being provided, a protection from the rays of the sun, the wind, or the rain, according to the climate of the country, would be the next object of attention. The shelter provided at first was naturally rude and incomplete, and was necessarily regulated by the habits of the people, the nature of the country, and the materials attainable on the spot. As civilisation proceeded, brought about by the communion of intellect,—the exchange of ideas and the increased means of transmitting information, so that the labour of one generation served as a foundation on which the next might commence their work—religious feelings induced the erection of certain buildings in honour of their gods, which should visibly convey the importance of their purpose. Principles were ultimately laid down for their construction, ingenuity was exerted, and all the other arts so far as they were understood, were brought to aid in their embellishment.

In tracing the history of architecture, then, we thus, in reality, examine the progress of the various parts of the world towards civilization, and, in many cases, their relapse into barbarism. All that remains of many once powerful nations are a few ruins, which, although isolated and dismantled, yet enable us to form correct ideas of the religion, recreations, manners, and ability of the people by whom they were erected. Ideas expressed in earth and stone by the contemporaries of the Pharaohs, which have exercised strong influence on society, remain to us almost uninjured. How powerful are the images which they raise! A link in a great chain, they serve by association to repeople the wastes wherein they stand, and call back to the mind remembrance of the whole course of past events.

We are apt, in the business and bustle of to-day, to forget too entirely the past: everything which serves to take us back to the early periods of the world's history, to force upon our notice the age of prophecy, the foundation of christianity, the rise and fall of states,—must tend not merely to interest but to expand the mind; enable us to estimate rightly our present position, and, by showing what *has* been done, assist in making further advances. You will see at once, too, that by a knowledge of architectural history, and the peculiarities which characterise the works of various people and epochs, the pleasure of travel is greatly increased: every stone is suggestive of an idea, and every old building becomes an open book, wherein, with this knowledge, those who run may read. I must not dwell longer, however, on what you may perhaps consider "the puff preliminary," but which is, in truth, said with strong feeling on the subject. That we may begin at the beginning, let us refer, though briefly, to some statements in the Bible as to our subject before the Flood.

According to Archbishop Usher, it was 4004 years before our era when Cain built the first city, and called it after his son Enoch. A considerable degree of skill in the constructive arts seems to have been attained, and artificers in brass and iron are spoken of, you will remember, as having been instructed by Tubal Cain.

There is great difference of opinion as to the date I have mentioned. Kennedy, in "Scripture Chronology," says there are 300 various statements concerning it to be found. Some chronologers have calculated that it was so much as 6,984 years before our time; but Usher's reckoning, which is founded on the assumption that the Hebrew text remains correct (not corrupted, as others have supposed), will serve our purpose. I do not intend to interrupt the course of the narrative by reference to chapter and verse of authorities: that heaven-born confidingness which, according to the poets, belongs to your sex, and is one of its holiest charms, will enable you to receive my statements without proof. Let me here say, too, that if I tell you much that you know, it will not be because I believe you ignorant of it, but for the sake of connection in the story.

The pursuits of the people, I said, regulated the nature of their habitations. Those who sought sustenance from the cultivation of the land, remaining stationary, would seek to appropriate natural hollows and caverns, and ultimately to form them, or to pile up such materials as the situation might afford to make a substantial place of refuge; whereas those tribes who pastured flocks (nomadic you would term them), and were consequently compelled to change their quarters as food began to fail, would make use of temporary or more portable constructions. Thus, where we find it recorded that Jabal "was the father of such as dwell in tents," it is added, "*and* of such as have cattle." This point we shall see further developed in tracing the progress of various nations.

The ark built by Noah is described as a structure of considerable size and importance. It was divided into three stories, and was no less than 300 cubits long (say 450 feet), 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high,—dimensions which show an attention to proportions somewhat singular, one-sixth of the length being taken for the width, and one-tenth of it for the height. This we will call 2,348 years before Christ.

When the ground was dry, Noah left the ark, and, as his first act, built an altar. Although not mentioned previously, altars had evidently been in use before this time, and may be regarded as the germ of all religious temples. This is worth noticing. A pavement about the altar for the sake of cleanliness, and then a slight inclosure of upright stones around that, as a protection, would be easy additions, and yet would require very few further steps, so far as arrangement is considered, to result in the temples of the Druids, the Egyptians, or the Greeks. This will be evident to you hereafter.

In our notice of what may be called Biblical Architecture, we must not overlook *stones of memorial*. Josephus relates that Adam, having prophesied the universal deluge, the children of Seth erected two pillars, one of brick and the other of stone, whereon they engraved memorials of their discoveries and inventions, for the benefit of after ages. Not to dwell on this statement, however, Jacob, after his dream of the ladder reaching to heaven, set up "for a pillar" the stone on which he had rested his head, poured oil on the top of it—thus consecrating it, and said: "This stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house." He therefore called the place Beth-el; and it is interesting to find that cromlechs in Ireland, and many single stones in Cornwall, attributed to the Phœnicians, retain the name Bothal. It was in use, too, amongst the Greeks.

Again, when Jacob and Laban were covenanting one with another, "Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar;" and further, said to his brethren, "Gather stones; and they took stones and made a heap." When God communed with Jacob and called him Israel, Jacob again raised a pillar; and then when Rachael died he set up a pillar on her grave. Here, you see, we have pillars raised, as an offering to God, in witness of a compact between men, and as a sepulchral monument.

About 200 years later, 1491 B.C. Moses, after receiving the divine message, built an altar under the hill, with "twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." And in Joshua it is recorded, that the children of Israel took twelve stones out of Jordan (the

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